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AN HIV LOVE STORY: JACOB BOEHME'S *BLOOD ON THE DANCE FLOOR*'S QUEER AND INDIGENOUS REVOLT

JACOB BOEHME, ALYSON CAMPBELL AND JONATHAN GRAFFAM

INTRODUCTION

This article is part of an ongoing conversation between Jacob Boehme, Alyson Campbell and Jonathan Graffam about Boehme's play *Blood on the Dance Floor* (Melbourne and Sydney, 2016; Australia and Canada tour, 2019),[1] and we see it now as a kind of queer collaborative musing that we are doing together to think through how the production works. While we have published some of our thinking on the play before,[2] we realised that none of

us was finished trying to articulate how it was created (Boehme), and the impact it had on us as spectators (Campbell and Graffam) and, indeed, that there was still so much to unravel in terms of its place in the context of queer performance in Australasia. In this article, we focus on key decisions made during the dramaturgical process of composing two sequences from the production, 'Sandridge Beach' and 'Anthony'. In examining the production's 'dramaturgy', we refer both to the structure and content of the piece and the processes of decision-making that are key to composing the work. While the term 'dramaturgy' is used to describe the selection of material in crafting and organising new work, on another level it seeks to make explicit the relationship between the artistic composition and the socio-political and cultural context in which the work is staged. There are multiple ways to approach any framing of *Blood on the Dance Floor* (*BOTDF*) – Indigenous identity, queerness and HIV – and, though we start from the perspective of queerness for this special issue, they are as inextricably interwoven and inseparable as the double helix of DNA. In our conversations for this article, what emerged most strongly from Jacob were ideas of love, the complexity – or, perhaps more precisely, absence – of Indigenous sexual lives from stage and other representational forms, and queer kinship.

METHODOLOGY

We use a queerly hybrid methodology that incorporates autoethnography and performance analysis, drawing on recent waves of queer theory to trace threads through the work. We write collaboratively, but at times Jacob's individual voice comes through so that his perspective as the writer, performer and lead artist driving the work, and whose lived experience is the basis for the show, is anchored throughout. In adopting autoethnographic modes of writing to trace the emotional and embodied experience of the performer (Boehme) and audience (via Campbell and Graffam), we jump at times between first and last names to better capture and inflect the personal nature of such reflections.[3] In this way, we (auto) ethnographically trace the queer aspects of making *BOTDF* and its encounter with audiences.

For this article, we explore the distinctly queer dramaturgical strategies employed by Boehme in staging the production and position these against a history of HIV and AIDS theatre and performance and Indigenous representation. It is not our intention to separate ideas of queer/ness or queer performance from Indigenous methodologies and identity or HIV experience. Instead, we aim to identify how these layers exist together as the dramaturgical fabric of the work, functioning simultaneously to convey meaning and affect, and consider how it is functioning in unique, new and vital ways.

CONTEXT: INDIGENOUS PERFORMANCE AND HIV

There is very little writing from within or around Indigenous performance about HIV.[4] A report recently made available (with open access) via the Figshare repository by authors Campbell and Graffam, with their research partner Jennifer Audsley, identifies major gaps that exist in the field: first, in the way that traditional (colonial) methods have previously failed, and are continuing to fail, at recording and documenting examples of live performance in this area; and second, that historically such performance work is most usually bound up in targeted health campaigns, so it appears that Boehme's production might be the only example of Indigenous Australian theatre examining an experience of living with HIV made specifically for the arts sector.[5]

Jacob describes his dream audience for the piece: queer, Aboriginal and living with HIV. In reality, he notes that he performed mostly for straight white people; however, his drive was to find ways to speak to, or touch, that dream audience. This drive becomes more and more apparent as we dig away at the layers of dramaturgical decision-making in the process of making *BOTDF*, and there is value for us in returning to select moments for further analysis, especially in adopting a queer theoretical lens. Distinct findings emerge that broaden our collective understanding of how the work functions, and how Boehme's queer identity has shaped the dramaturgical composition; importantly, for Jacob this leads to realisations about his practice being intrinsically queer and how this queerness interrelates with Indigeneity and Indigenous performance.

The *BOTDF* creative team consists of writer and performer Boehme, director Isaac Drandic, choreographer Mariaa Randall, spatial designer Jenny Hector, sound designer James Henry and videographer Keith Deverell. The team draw on a multidisciplinary practice to stage Jacob's stories, weaving together elements of ceremony, theatre, dance, monologue and moving image, consistently drawing in traditional Aboriginal modes of performance. Jacob switches character fluidly and frequently and, importantly, often addresses the audience directly as himself.

JACOB: To define what might constitute the Indigenous-led, informed or embodied dramaturgies and/or performance making methodologies the creative team drew on during the making of *BOTDF*, perhaps I first need to distinguish the differences between Indigenous process and Indigenous performance, in particular, performed Indigeneity. In traditional and customary dance practices, danced across lands now known as Australia, in a larger ceremony or song cycle, the song you hear ignites facts and memories of the story, which links to a place, landmark, boundary or territory, in part visually represented in the body paintings on an individual dancer. This identifies his relationship to that story through matrilineal, patrilineal, skin or totemic kinship, by symbols and design, and is further defined by and in direct relationship to his place or belonging to the story, by the sister, cousin-sister, aunty, mother, who dances behind him with specific hand and arm placements that signify to you the audient, her relationship to him.

This complex series of simultaneous symbols and signs found in one song, one dance, within a wider song cycle of traditional Aboriginal ceremony, articulates an attempt in this work at embodying Indigenous dramaturgical processes, derived from cultural and ceremonial dance training, which guided the creation and creative team of *BOTDF* but for a Western theatre stage. It is a framework that draws on notions of place and identity, of belonging to community and country, and of kinship. It speaks to Indigenous knowing and knowledge systems based in the collective, the circle and connectivity.

This framework determined ways in which script writing was approached, or rather, 'scoring', as I came to call it. It guided directorial decisions in how we staged and ordered 'episodes' in the script and it manifested itself in our approach to making choreography. It also contributed to the aesthetic and storytelling choices and conventions, realised in the form of a cinema screen which became a proxy for the body paint I otherwise would have worn had we produced a more 'traditional' form of ceremony.

The performance is intentionally missing theatrical tropes we have come to associate with both traditional cultural events and contemporary Indigenous dance and theatre: gum leaves, smoke, ochre, regional footwork and dance styles. To steer away from these obvious and expected tropes by using a hybrid form of traditional dance for Western stages was

> probably the boldest application of Indigenous dramaturgy that the team implemented and adhered to. In order for us to find our authentic selves and an Indigenous dramaturgical approach which honoured the team's origins – a mixed team of Indigenous creative leads belonging to nations and clan groups from across the country – we deliberately avoided the *performance of* Indigeneity, but rather strove to build foundations in the work's dramaturgy, conventions and approach that drew on over sixty thousand years of ceremonial performance and creation.

Building from this analysis of how Jacob understands his dramaturgy and making methods as Indigenous, we (authors) can draw some parallels with what it is to make queer work, or make work queerly. In turning now towards 'queer', the argument arises for us that in terms of functioning to resist 'normative' traditions of Western theatre, Indigenous and queer dramaturgies become sisters, working dually towards the decolonisation and subversion of theatre spaces and practices that have historically marginalised Indigenous and queer peoples, poking at the established status quo from multiple angles. For Jacob, challenging his own ideas, challenging collaborators, venues, the creative process and producers was a constant rallying against heteronormative and colonial theatre-making conventions and expectations. Instead of distinguishing between Indigenous and queer dramaturgies, we prioritise tracing how Jacob's own queer ori-

entations and/or sensibility – particularly as gay/queer, Blak and poz – simultaneously drive the content and artistic choices through a deeply personal, embodied and *felt* approach to making. We move to two selected moments from the production to conduct our analysis.

'SANDRIDGE BEACH'

Our first moment is the 'Sandridge Beach' sequence. To introduce it, Jonno, who is a white, gay, cis-male theatre-maker, reflects on his experience as an audience member. We use this – Jonno's embodied recount – to position the relationship between the queer material, its queerly affective aesthetic form and a particular, personal, reception from a gay/queer spectator. We weave excerpts from the *BOTDF* script through Jonno's writing to offer the reader a better sense of how the performance's textual and material components function together. For accuracy, Jonno has accessed a video recording of the production to inform his descriptions while holding firmly on to his original in-person experience of the work. This description is then situated alongside Boehme's intentions for making the sequence and an examination of how queer impulses drive the writing and underpin the aesthetic composition of its performance.

JONNO: From darkness, projected visuals fade in, filling the entire scenic backdrop of the stage: a fading sun reflecting off the lapping waves of a shoreline. A figure stands onstage in darkness, shadowed by

the dim projected light. An ominous sub-bass thumps through the space, paired with high-pitched ringing and synthesizer, casting an unsettling effect over the visuals. The soundscape builds and cascades – a swirling effect – and through this sonic movement a heartbeat can be heard. Warm light comes up on the figure standing still onstage, performer Boehme, his speech carrying over the soundscape:

Sandridge Beach
2am
A new moon
A million eyes spark above
Streetlights flicker
Trucks and cranes
Out on the Port
Been into the night.[6]

Night-time visuals emerge and dissolve in projections behind Boehme: city lights over the water, a sandy beach, streetlights overhead, trees and leaves – coalescing and blurring in sudden, staggered movements. The performer's voice rises and his pace quickens,

She-oaks and tea trees
Become prowling men
Snapping twigs
Keep the nerve on guard

Cologne
Piss
Clouds of amyl
Anal sex
Rabbits and fags
You can smell them
Hiding
Hunting
You feel their stares
Their breath
Panting
On the back of your neck

Sitting in the audience my throat tightens and my back arches in discomfort. This feeling is all too familiar. The sexual tension and drive of this moment is rising. And boy have I been here before. It's all the times I've not been able to control the urge, the thumping and insatiable desire. It's the familiar gay male hunt. I look online. I go to parks and beaches. I go to bars and clubs. I go wherever I can. I'm looking to fuck. Reckless, dangerous, 'out of character' – I don't care. I need it and I'm gonna get it. But in this moment of performance, *we're* gonna get it: *we're* on the prowl. *We're* looking to get fucked. We're in this moment together, with Jacob.

Boehme's poetic vocals continue,

You weave and duck around trees
Stumble across men on their knees
Tragic old queer cock in hand
Too old for luck
Too old to fuck
Tall dark shadow leans against a tree
Shoulders broad
Rounded chest
Long strong arms
Long lean legs
The perfect stranger
Draws you in
Soft lips
Spearmint
A rush of blood to your skin
He grabs your waist
You slam his hips
Rip off his shirt
He throws off yours
His armpits are ripe
Sunblock lingers on skin
Hands like spiders
Creep down your back
A tentative finger tests the edge
You signal,

'*Yes*'
Blood racing
He works his way in
Blood pumping
You buckle again
Then
Deeper
Constant
Deeper
Slow
Constant
Steady
Deep
Ready
'Fuck me, please'
'You want it?'
'Yes, fuck me'
'Raw? … Are you Clean?'

The sound design coalesces into something of a drum and bass track: bass and sub-bass lines are heavily overlayed with a range of synthesizer samples. It's reminiscent of what you encounter at a seedy, underground basement club at 3 a.m. while wired on cocaine, pills and/or the cheap thrill of raw lust. Here, Boehme merges the outdoor hunt for sex with indoor, early hours (twilight) queer club energy.

Post-date fuck
Invites you up
Candles burn
Making love
On the bed, the couch
The kitchen floor
'Man, I'd love to fuck you raw
Are you clean?'
In the club 3 a.m.
A wink
A nod
You follow him in
A chemical rough
Against the door
He wants it raw
'Are you clean?'
Online bud
Wants to hook up
Digs your pic
He's free
And quick
Are you clean?
Are you clean?
Are you clean?

The tension builds to the point it transforms into something beyond intense sexual energy and spills into rage. Boehme, who has so far stood still, lifts his arm and points a finger at individual audience members: 'Are you clean? Are you clean? Are you clean?' His voice and finger quiver with anger, he crosses the front of the stage staring unflinchingly out at his audience.

This is the moment the performance reaches its first affective climax.

As the music hits its peak and as Boehme continues to point and shout, 'Are you clean?' there is a slow slide of synthesizer, the intensity of the bass and sub-bass lowers and the visual projections fade to black. The moment, the *feeling*, is changing, a pressure valve is turned: relief. Boehme stands in silence, breathing. He speaks,

> T-Cells on guard
> He turns, pulls away
> Catches your eye
> There it is
> That look
> Pity
> And fear
> They always run

Lingering sub-bass notes carry through this, entwined with something of an abstracted siren – a slow, pain-filled wailing that sits

underneath his poetic text. Disembodied voices fill the space, pre-recorded and playing over the speakers. The warm light over Boehme's front dissolves and is replaced by a cold profile that catches him from the side and casts a shadow over half of his body. He stands still. The voices and phrases continue, they are repeated and begin to overlap, surrounding Jacob and filling the entire performance space.

> 'We could've been really good together'
> 'I think you're a great guy'
> 'Can we be friends?'
> 'But you don't look sick'
> 'Yeah, I like to top but I'm mainly a bottom. How's this gonna work?'
> 'You didn't use my toothbrush, did ya?'
> 'You fucken sick cunt'
> 'You're the ones that give us all a bad name'
> 'If I see you online again, I'll let them all know exactly what you are: a fucking vampire'

A reverb effect is added to the voices, giving the sequence a surreal quality. Close-up shots of a male figure appear in flash projections behind Boehme: a neck scratch, a rubbing of the chest, a turn of the head. Jacob remains still in the centre of it all. The disembodied voices gather and repeat, building and blending together into one vicious assault. In this culmination, the increasingly

reverb-altered voices coalesce so that while the voices themselves eventually fall away, the sound carries on and transforms into a form of vibrational energy that, to describe it, resembles something like the force of a freight train coming straight for us. The soundscape hits a peak and suddenly plunges into silence while, simultaneously, the visual close-up of an eye flashes on the screen behind Boheme.

We, the audience, sit with Boehme through these shifts as the performance reaches its second affective climax in a sequence that lasts a total of less than six minutes.

Since attending the performance at Arts House in 2016, this particular sequence has stayed vivid in my embodied memory of it: a sense of danger and thrill in the seeking of random sex; the imagined smell of amyl, sweat and anal sex against she-oak and eucalyptus; an increase in my breath; perspiration and heat around my neck; the nauseating turn of the gut as Boehme shouts, 'Are you clean?'; the brief lapse into calmness before another intense sonic and visual episode that leaves my mind shuttering, overwhelmed and under attack; and, finally, remembering feeling an exhaustive collapse into rest as the production once again adopts a slow and relatively calmer tone as it moves out of this moment and into something else.

QUEER DRAMATURGY

To skip from the perspective of spectator back to Jacob as maker, in discussion it emerges that this sequence is one that nearly did not

make the dramaturgical cut. It caused some discomfort, or maybe confusion, among the creative team and, in piecing this together in retrospect, Jacob notes that he was the only queer person in a team of mostly straight/heterosexual Indigenous artists. As such, he was obliged to articulate the queer need for this moment that his collaborators might deem 'too gay', 'slightly pornographic', 'too explicit'. Here we start to find the crux of what it means to be a queer maker bringing that perspective into the room. Years of watching straight sex and 'romance' have made it still so necessary to see ourselves as queer people on stages and screens (of all sizes). For Jacob, this raw, unashamed celebration of the hunt was vital.

JACOB: It feels sometimes like we, as Indigenous peoples, portray ourselves as part of a canon of archetypes or Indigenous theatre tropes. Not one of them is sexualised. If they are, they are usually domestic servants and female victims of rape, or drunken male perpetrators. Rarely is our sexuality celebrated without drugs, without alcohol, or without force. This was one of the reasons to really advocate for the 'Sandridge Beach' sequence to remain in the work. It's very much a celebration of the hunt, a celebration of cis-male gay sexual behaviour: unashamed, raw and unapologetic.

AFFECT STICKS

From an audience perspective, we feel it in various ways: familiarity for some, the unfamiliar for others. It is as this moment moves towards its climax that there is a specific familiarity – recognisable only to the dream audience Jacob is making the work for – of the stigma, shame, violence and rejection of living with HIV. Empathy and other traits of 'character' and identification are in there, but the particular affective and verbal structuring of sequence means that any of us who sit outside that specific group are still obliged to *feel* it, to be placed in that moment and understand in a new way the impact of the repetition of judgement and rejection. This feeling emerges through both the affective builds that Jonno has evoked so viscerally, but also through a semantic switch in the narrative that moves the protagonist from 'I' to 'you'. We discuss this idea in our previous publication[7] but it's worth reiterating here in terms of the queering taking place. The dramaturgical sleight of hand – placing the audience on the receiving end of that brutalising question, 'Are you clean?', disorientates us. How did I (audience member) end up here? When did it flip? Your brain can't quite catch up – but we know something happened, it felt *different*.

We keep coming back to the 'Sandridge Beach' sequence because of its lasting impact on us. We understand this has to do with its affect and what affect theorist Brian Massumi would refer to as the strength of the image: visual, aural, verbal – however that image is composed – making an impact that is initially ungraspable,

but which insists on returning to be dealt with through what he calls a 'backward referral in time'.[8] It's not that these intense images are meaningless; on the contrary, the affective strength means it lingers with us demanding to be made sense of. Feminist theatre scholar Elaine Aston theorises this kind of impact as producing a 'post-theatrical sequel'.[9] Writing about Sarah Kane, whose work was widely misinterpreted early on as having no political aim, Aston writes:

> [A]s [she] considered that contact with 'art'/theatre could bring about change, this meant that she worked with a view to theatre having a post-theatrical sequel: a reawakening of perception, an invitation to see differently.[10]

Queer feminist philosopher Sara Ahmed's essay 'Happy Objects' also offers us ways to understand how affect works here. She writes, 'Affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values and objects'.[11] In this particular essay, Ahmed notes 'the slide between affective and moral economies', identifying as 'affect aliens' those who do not reproduce normative values: 'feminist kill-joys, unhappy queers, and melancholic migrants'.[12]

In examining the 'Sandridge Beach' moment, we posit that Jacob places himself in the risky role of affect alien: the queer, Indigenous man with HIV who is angry and hurt and makes sure the audience knows it; makes sure they *feel* it. It is perilous for a performer to be the affect alien, as this risks the 'good will' of their

audience (let's call it good will for now), or 'kills their joy'. But in *BOTDF*, Jacob makes use of affect to work as contagion[13] or as what Campbell and co-writer Dirk Gindt have called 'viral dramaturgies',

> The term 'viral dramaturgies' is indebted to sexuality and English studies scholar Tim Dean's study of barebacking culture in which he conceives material and metaphoric 'viral consanguinity' as a new, experimental form of (gay) kinship that turns 'strangers into relatives' (2009: 91). We suggest that the affective potential of live performance might also be thought of as a mode of turning 'strangers into relatives': dramaturgically, performance works like a virus as it moves initially into the individual body's system, producing change at a physiological level, such as shifts in body temperature, hairs standing on end or an increase in heartbeat, as theatre phenomenologists and affect theorists would argue (Gilbert 2004; Massumi 2002; States 1985, 2007).[14]

As outlined above, this affect does not float aimlessly, but returns to insist on sense-making. In the meantime, however, as queer performance theorists Jill Dolan[15] and José Muñoz[16] would argue, these intense moments of performance can produce affective communities, in which audiences feel themselves allied with each other, and with a broader, more capacious sense of a public.[17]

As a theatre-maker – a queer as well as Indigenous one –

Jacob knows both how to build this affective community *and* how to structure this moment of affective alienation from it within the wider dramaturgy of the whole piece. Building a sense of affective community might include the moments of humour, particularly at the start; direct eye contact and speech; and close physical connection, by starting in among the audience. The affect alien does not present as 'so queer' or so angry throughout the whole show, but allows moments of vulnerability and lightness to keep us with him and bring us up to and out the other side of this moment alongside, rather than against, him. In this way he can be simultaneously affect alien and generous guide through this experience of being the affect alien.

'ANTHONY' – QUEER KINSHIP AND LOVE

We turn now to our second moment from the work, a sequence in *BOTDF* titled 'Anthony'. Importantly, this moment follows another in the show that has the character Jake conversing with his father; Boehme performs this by shifting between embodying them both. The father requests that when he passes, Jake take him to country, lay him in a boat, light it on fire, and send it off into the horizon. 'Your sister and brother might want to come too, ey? … But you gotta organise it. You. The eldest son of the eldest son of the eldest son.'[18] A soundscape of abstracted choral chanting (the voice of singer Charley Pride) sits under this scene and continues as Boehme sits crossed-legged, hands-on-knees, staring out to his audience. His face is bathed in the warm

glow of light which casts shadow over his body. Behind him a campfire is projected in black and white – flames dancing and flickering. He speaks softly and slowly, his words heavy in the air:

JAKE: Anthony. Beautiful dancer. Limbs long and sinewy, like a grasshopper. And eyes! Beautiful green eyes too good to be on a man, women would kill for 'em. We'd go to the Shift every Friday after class, same table, by the window, perfect spot to catch every passing bit of trade. Donna Summer blaring, disco lights going off like it's 3 a.m. Something's up.

'What's wrong with you?' 'Nothing' 'What's up?'

'I got my results back …' I look at him. He turns to me and says 'That. That look. I don't want that. I don't need anyone's fuckin' pity. I don't want that look, right.' I didn't know what to say. I'd never … I hadn't come across … Week later he asks me to drive him back to his country. He wanted to go back to country. We get there and his family calls him sick, disown him, ask us to leave. Month later, there he is, in his bedroom hanging from the ceiling fan. They allow me to collect him from the morgue. When I get there, they give me two garbage bags. They cut him up for research. Took everything. Took his liver, his kidneys, took his lungs, just sliced him up. They even took his eyes, those beautiful green eyes.

> I just wanted to give him a hug. All that was left of him was two cheap, black garbage bags. And then he was gone. Disappeared. No one ever mentioned his death. And no one ever spoke his name again. Anthony.[19]

We focus on 'Anthony' in a turn toward ideas of queer kinship and love. Such discourse sits strategically and usefully next to notions of familial kinship, just as Boehme positions Anthony's story alongside those of his own blood-relatives.

Anthony's story and Boehme's memories of the relationship that the two shared were a significant driver behind Boehme's commitment to making *BOTDF*. It was another sequence that was highly scrutinised by his non-queer collaborators, with the suggestion it be cut from the show due to its apparent lack of dramaturgical cohesion with the rest of the content. But, as Boehme articulates, as well as acknowledging Anthony's story, and his influence on the creation of *BOTDF*, there are too many vital ideas and feelings raised in this moment for queer and HIV-positive audiences that may not necessarily be apparent to collaborators (or audiences) who are not involved in gay/queer and HIV communities. Jacob's writing here chimes again with ideas of the affect alien.

JACOB: In the show up until this point – not just with Percy, the melodramatic drag queen who opens it, but also the character Jake, who we meet once Percy disrobes and becomes them – I am affecting

> the trope of the 'funny gay', a 'normal gay', one of the ones that is easily digestible. For me, as a writer, performer, and as a queer and Indigenous man living with HIV, I feel I get released from this when I talk about Anthony. It is the one time I get to be queer, Indigenous and HIV-positive without it having to be tokenistic, an issue, or a box. When I talk about Anthony, his death, and the life I knew with him, it feels like all those identities come together in this moment. It's in depicting chosen family, specifically for Blak queer community living with HIV. While it's a celebration of those chosen families, it's also an exposé of the failure of Blak community: the ignorance and willful discrimination of the 'other', and the effects of colonisation on this. Aboriginal communities have become so Christianised that homosexuality, which was once acceptable, has now become condemned because of Christian and colonial influence. Importantly, Anthony's story in the work is also not about queer sex or desire, it's about queer love and kinship. Every time we encounter a story that 'memorializes' HIV, or those who have died from AIDS, it's about sex and shame. I wanted this to be an HIV love story, not an HIV death story or sex story.

Boehme's desire to write a 'new' version of an HIV play – an HIV love story – sits purposefully against popular mainstream artistic representations of the AIDS crisis typically framed through the gay white male lens (see, for instance: *It's a Sin*; *Holding the Man*; *Angels in America*).[20] Following activist and author Sarah Schulman,

Campbell and Gindt argue that such works can be seen as part of a 'process of gentrification, or a selective amnesia that sanitises, rationalises and normalises the narrative, potentially producing a misleading representation of the AIDS crisis and eliding the ongoing conditions of living with HIV'.[21] While a nostalgic turn back to this era might permit what Schulman terms a 'disallowed grief',[22] for artists living with HIV, like Boehme, a burning question remains: why not write stories about now, about a contemporary HIV moment? Literary and HIV activist scholar Marty Fink suggests, 'Telling and retelling easily accessible stories can obscure the violence of erasing histories that are harder to find'.[23] Staging Anthony's story, within the wider framing of the *BOTDF* production, can thus be seen as a refusal from Boehme to allow Blak queer lives – and stories – to be violently discarded and buried by dominant HIV and AIDS narratives. We also posit that such caretaking of queer and HIV (hi)stories constitutes an act of queer/HIV kinship and love.

In *Families We Choose*, anthropologist Kath Weston proposes that lesbians and gays align themselves with and within 'families of choice', which sit in distinction to 'biological family'.[24] As Elizabeth Freeman posits, for Weston such chosen families do not seek to imitate or replicate biological families but their constitution 'appropriates and transforms the terminology of "straight" kinship, emphasizing the elements of freedom, creativity and flexibility … Gay kinship, then, transforms rather than merely derives from its heterosexual corollaries.'[25] Queer interventions in kinship studies thus demand new models of family, the recognition of

friends as family, and a reimagining of the roles that queer people take up in family. Scholar Jack Halberstam advocates for the forgetting of 'family' altogether to allow for other modes of relating, belonging and caring.[26] Drawing on a selection of popular films, Halberstam illustrates that in many communities (including wild animals), the collective will and survival of a population forces individuals to adapt or abandon their familial roles according to their needs or those of others. This shift towards community and away from familial units can be understood as vital for the survival and longevity of queer people.

Crucially, the notion of adaptability and shifting relational dynamics within queer chosen family points to the kinds of caretaking that are necessarily carried out and shared by individuals at different times. In *Forget Burial: HIV Kinship, Disability and Queer/Trans Narratives of Care*, Fink asserts that HIV-chosen families, particularly within Black, Indigenous, and other minority and underserved communities in the United States, emerged as a grass-roots response to the devastating failures of biological families, government and health services, and were essential for meeting their medical needs.[27] The HIV narratives unearthed by Fink through archival work

> also uncover disappointments about inadequate care and the harm that occurs when care fails. HIV narratives thus further expose the ways in which capitalism and neoliberalism, racism and colonialism, and anti-queer and anti-trans violence create barriers to giving and receiving mutual care.[28]

Anthony's story, as told in *BOTDF*, can be understood as a powerful example of a series of devastating failures of care by biological family, non-queer Indigenous community, governments and health services – in his death but also in the refusal to acknowledge or mourn his death. In opposition to this, the patrilineal expectation set up by Boehme of caretaking for the father's funeral ceremony appears natural and expected of the 'eldest son of the eldest son of the eldest son' – an honour. Anthony, however, is forgotten, erased and discarded. Jacob, then, is not only caretaker for Anthony's physical remains but, in insisting on the inclusion of Anthony's story in *BOTDF*, as a theatre-maker he is taking on a (queer) role of caretaking for his memory. Jacob ensures that Anthony's name is not forgotten – that it is spoken, kept alive in the world – and, by telling his story in such a way, Anthony's life is unburied, unhidden, brought into the present, and celebrated in a moment of queer/HIV kinship and love.

CONCLUSION

Having lingered again on the 'Sandridge Beach' and 'Anthony' sequences, after obsessively – perhaps queerly – returning to them over and over again, we are hoping through this article to identify and celebrate how queerness inflects Jacob's dramaturgical decision-making and, ultimately, the way the performance works for/on audiences (dream or otherwise) through its affective strength. While the article responds to an ongoing gap in literature surrounding

Indigenous Australian performance on HIV and AIDS, Jacob's articulation of contemporary Indigenous dramaturgies and the queer impulses driving his creative adaptation/evolution of traditional and customary Aboriginal dance forms in making this work stands on its own as a new and vital contribution to theatre and performance scholarship. *BOTDF* is a crucial part of the lineage of queer performance in Australasia, taking up space for Blak, queer and HIV histories in mainstage environments and touring internationally, remembering queer kinships and simultaneously creating new ones.

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NOTES

1 *Blood on the Dance Floor* (*BOTDF*) premiered at Arts House in North Melbourne in June 2016, followed closely by a season at Carriageworks as part of Sydney Festival. Boehme toured the production to Canada in early 2019, where it was programmed in a range of Indigenous performance festivals, and later the same year toured the work to Darwin, Canberra, Adelaide and Melbourne, as well as a range of smaller cities and locations across Australia. The production proved highly successful by both community and industry standards; see, for instance: Cameron Woodhead, '*Blood on the Dance Floor* Review: Artistry Resounds with the Pulse of Life', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 June 2016, http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/stage/blood-on-the-dance-floor-review-jacob-boehmes-artistry-resounds-with-the-pulse-of-life-20160602-gp9onj.html.

2 An interview with Boehme about *BOTDF* has previously been published by Campbell and Graffam in the volume *Viral Dramaturgies: HIV and AIDS in Performance in the Twenty-First Century* (2018). In that chapter, we frame a conversation that is focused more closely on articulating the Indigenous methodologies and processes for decolonising the rehearsal space undertaken by Boehme and team. While there are some overlaps in terms of the moments of performance selected for analysis between the chapter and this article, we are careful to clarify throughout what has previously been covered while orienting our discussion now towards queer/ness and the queer dramaturgical strategies used in the making process. See Alyson Campbell and Jonathan Graffam, 'Blood, Shame, Resilience and Hope: Indigenous Theatre Maker Jacob Boehme's *Blood on the Dance Floor*', in *Viral Dramaturgies: HIV and AIDS in Performance in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Alyson Campbell and Dirk Gindt (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) 343–65.

Campbell and Graffam have recently completed a project with Jennifer Audsley that documents a history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and communities exploring HIV in theatre and performance work for health promotion purposes, education, or for the arts sector. The report aims to provide a useful background and history of the field for Indigenous Australian artists making work in the area. See Jonathan Graffam, Jennifer Audsley and Alyson Campbell, *HIV and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Performance: A Context and Background to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Performance Work Around HIV*, University of Melbourne, 2022. Report. DOI: 10.26188/623be75924913.

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3 Campbell and Graffam have used this methodology in their work on *Cake Daddy* (2018–19) with lead artist Ross Anderson-Doherty; see: Ross Anderson-Doherty, Alyson Campbell and Jonathan Graffam, 'Baking Cake Daddy: Transforming Fat-Phobia to Fat-Positivity with a Slice of Fat-Queer Subversive Fun to Fatten the Stage', *Fat Studies* (2022): 1–18, DOI: 10.1080/21604851.2022.2049494.

4 Graffam, Audsley and Campbell, *HIV and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Performance*.

5 Ibid, 30.

6 Excerpts from Jacob Boehme, *Blood on the Dance Floor* script (2016–19). A full copy of the script can be purchased here: https://apt.org.au/product/blood-on-the-dance-floor-2/.

7 Campbell and Graffam, 'Blood, Shame, Resilience and Hope', 356–7.

8 Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2002).

9 Elaine Aston, *Feminist Views on the English Stage: Women Playwrights, 1990–2000*

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 83.

10 Ibid.

11 Sara Ahmed, 'Happy Objects', in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds), *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010) 29–51, at 29.

12 Ibid, 30.

13 Ahmed sets out the idea of affect as contagion succinctly, noting a line of scholars following on mainly from psychologist Silvan Tomkins, for example: Anna Gibbs, 'Contagious Feelings: Pauline Hanson and the Epidemiology of Affect', *Australian Humanities Review* 24 (2001): http://www.australianhumanitiesReview.org; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Performativity, Pedagogy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); Elspeth Probyn, *Blush: Faces of Shame* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005). See Ahmed, 'Happy Objects', 39.

14 Alyson Campbell and Dirk Gindt, 'Viral Dramaturgies: HIV and AIDS in Performance in the Twenty-First Century', in *Viral Dramaturgies: HIV and AIDS in Performance in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Alyson Campbell and Dirk Gindt (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) 3–46, at 8–9.

15 Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Jill Dolan, 'Performance, Utopia, and the "Utopian Performative"', *Theatre Journal* 53.3 (2001): 455–79.

16 José Estaban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); José Estaban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, MN, and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

17 Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 2.

18 Boehme, *Blood on the Dance Floor* script.

19 Ibid.

20 Peter Hoar (dir.), *It's a Sin* (Red Production Company, 2021); Tim Conigrave, *Holding the Man* (Australia, Penguin Group, 1996); and film version, Neil Armfield (dir.), *Holding the Man* (Screen Australia, 2015); Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*, 2 vols (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1993–96); and TV miniseries, Mike Nichols (dir.), *Angels in America* (HBO, 2003).

21 Campbell and Gindt, 'Viral Dramaturgies', 22.

22 Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012) 46.

23 Marty Fink, *Forget Burial: HIV Kinship, Disability and Queer/Trans Narratives of Care* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2021) 7.

24 Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

25 Elizabeth Freeman, 'Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory', in George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (eds), *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies* (Malden, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007) 295–314, at 304.

26 Jack (Judith) Halberstam, 'Forgetting Family: Queer Alternatives to Oedipal Relations', in George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (eds), *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies* (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 315–24.

27 Fink, *Forget Burial*.

28 Ibid, 8.